

## **Black Hills Healthcare System**



**Methicillin Resistant Staphylococcal Aureus  
(MRSA)**

***Patient and Family Information***

## What is MRSA?



Staphylococcus Aureus, often referred to simply as “staph,” is a bacteria commonly found on the skin of healthy people. Occasionally, staph can get into the body and cause an infection. This infection can be minor (such as pimples, boils, and other skin conditions) or serious (such as blood infections or pneumonia). Methicillin is an antibiotic commonly used to treat staph infections. Although methicillin is very effective in treating most staph infections, some staph bacteria have developed resistance to methicillin and can no longer be killed by this antibiotic. These resistant bacteria are called methicillin-resistant Staphylococcus aureus, or MRSA.

## How can you get MRSA?

Anyone can get MRSA. You can get MRSA by touching someone or something that has the bacteria on it and then touching your skin or your nose.

Some ways that you could get MRSA:

- Touching the infected skin of someone who has MRSA
- Using personal items of someone who has MRSA, such as towels, wash cloths, clothes or athletic equipment
- Touching objects, such as public phones or doorknobs, that have MRSA bacteria on the surface and then touching your nose or an open sore, paper cut, etc.
- You may increase your chances of getting MRSA if:
  - You take antibiotics a lot
  - You take antibiotics without a prescription
  - You don't follow your doctor's directions when taking antibiotics (for example you stop taking your antibiotics before finishing a prescription or you skip doses)
  - You frequently get cuts or scrapes on your skin (Your skin serves as a barrier to infection. When the skin gets damaged, staph bacteria can enter and increase your risk for infection)

## There are two ways you can have MRSA:

1. You can have an active infection.

An active infection means you have symptoms. This is usually a boil, a sore, or an infected cut that is red, swollen or pus filled.

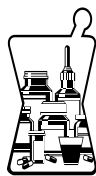
2. You can be a carrier:

If you are a carrier you do not have symptoms that you can see, but you still have MRSA bacteria living in your nose or on your skin. If you are a carrier, your doctor may say that you are colonized. These words - "carrier" and "colonized" - mean the same thing. Persons who are carriers are at a higher risk for developing a MRSA infection

## What does MRSA look like?

Most often, MRSA causes infections on the skin. These infections may look like any one of the following:

- Large, red, painful bumps under the skin (called boils or abscesses)
- A cut that is swollen, hot and filled with pus
- Blisters filled with pus (called impetigo)
- Sores that look and feel like spider bites (However, MRSA is not caused by a spider bite or any other insect bite.)
- It is also possible to have MRSA in other areas of the body, such as blood, lungs, joints, eyes, and urine.



## Is MRSA treatable?

Yes. Although MRSA is resistant to many antibiotics and often difficult to treat, a few antibiotics can still successfully cure MRSA infections. Patients who are only colonized with MRSA usually do not need treatment.

## Can MRSA spread?

Yes. MRSA can spread among other patients, who are often very sick with weak immune systems that may not be able to fight off infections. MRSA is almost always spread by physical contact, and not through the air. These types of infections are less common, although they can be more serious. Hospitals usually take special steps to prevent the spread of MRSA from patient to patient. One of these steps may be to separate, or *isolate* a patient with MRSA from other patients.

## What happens when a patient with MRSA is isolated?

### VA Black Hills process:

1. Because the patients in the hospital already may have weakened immune systems, the patients with *colonizations* or active *infections* are placed in a private room, or in a room with one or more patients who also have MRSA. In our CLC (community living center environments), only those who have an active infection are placed into precautions.
2. The patient's movement from the room is limited to essential purposes only, such as for medical procedures or emergencies.
3. Health care workers usually put on gloves (and sometimes hospital gowns) before entering the patient's room, remove their gloves (and gowns) before leaving the room, and then immediately wash their hands.
4. Visitors also may be asked to put on gloves (and sometimes gowns), especially if they are helping to take care of the patient and likely to come in contact with the patient's skin, blood, urine, wound, or other body substances. ***Visitors should always wash their hands before leaving the patient's room*** to make sure they don't take MRSA out of the room with them.



### How long does a MRSA patient have to be isolated?

The hospital staff will determine when it is safe for a person with MRSA to come out of isolation. Because MRSA is difficult to treat, this may be a few days to a few weeks or longer. The next time you come back to our VA, you may be placed into precautions again.

### Is it safe to be in the same room as a person with MRSA?

Again, healthy people are at very little risk of getting infected with MRSA. So, as long as family members or other visitors are healthy, it's okay for them to be in the same room with MRSA. Casual contact, such as touching or hugging, is also okay. However, be sure to **wash your hands** before you leave the hospital room (or the patient's home).



Persons who are very ill or who have weak immune systems should avoid handling the body substances of a person with MRSA and should limit their physical contact to no more than casual touching. They should also **wash their hands** after physical contact with a person with MRSA.



### Can my children get MRSA by being around a person with MRSA?

Healthy people, including children, are at very little risk of getting infected with MRSA.

### What about my pets?

Pets have about the same risk of acquiring MRSA as people. If your pet is ill, please discuss this issue with your veterinarian.



#### If your provider gives you antibiotics:

Take them exactly as prescribed.  
Do not stop early, even if you feel better.  
The last few pills kill the toughest germs.



## I'm ready to go home. What should I know?

If you are leaving the hospital and will continue to treat your infection at home, please ask your healthcare provider or nurse about specific care needs. General information:

### To Change Bandages



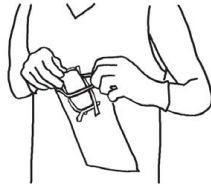
1. Wash and dry your hands well



2. Put on disposable gloves



3. Remove the old bandage



4. Put the old bandage in a plastic bag. Take off the gloves and put them in the plastic bag too.



5. Wash and dry your hands well



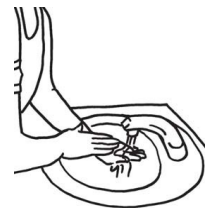
6. Put on a new, clean pair of gloves.



7. Apply the new bandage. If you have a leaking sore, put on extra dressings to keep the drainage from leaking through.



8. Take off the gloves and put them in the plastic bag. Seal or tie the bag and throw it away in the regular trash.



9. Clean your hands with soap and water and dry well.

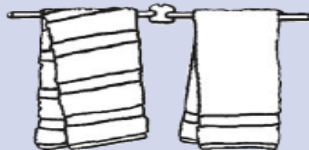
## Preventing the Spread of MRSA

### What can I do to help prevent the spread of MRSA to others?

- Clean your hands often with soap and water or an alcohol based hand sanitizer
- Take a bath or shower often, be sure to use soap to clean your body while showering or bathing
- Wash your sheets and towels at least once a week
- Change your clothes daily and wash them before wearing again
- Do not share towels, wash cloths, razors, or other personal items
- If you get a cut or scrape on your skin, clean it with soap and water and then cover it with a bandage
- Do not touch sores; if you do touch a sore, clean your hands right away
- Cover any infected sores with a bandage and clean your hands right away after putting on the bandage
- Wear clothes that cover your bandages and sores, if possible
- Clean frequently used areas of your home (bathrooms, countertops, etc.) daily with a household cleaner
- Do not participate in contact sports until your sores have healed
- Do not go to a public gym, sauna, hot tub or pool until sores have healed

#### **Don't share any towels.**

Use a special towel. Mark it or keep it in a separate place so others won't use it.



## Do I need to be careful when I do laundry?

Yes. If you have an active MRSA infections, dirty clothes and bedding can spread MRSA bacteria.

- When touching your laundry or changing your sheets, hold the dirty laundry away from your body and clothes to prevent bacteria from getting on your clothes
- Wear disposable gloves to touch laundry that is soiled with body fluids, like drainage from a sore, urine or feces
- Immediately put the laundry into the washer or into a plastic bag until it can be washed
- Wash your laundry with warm or hot water, use bleach if possible.
- Dry in a warm or hot dryer and make sure the clothes are completely dry
- Clean your hands after touching dirty sheets or clothing and before touching clean laundry, even if you have been wearing gloves
- Throw gloves away after taking them off (do not reuse them) and clean your hands



## What about cleaning my house?



- Use a household disinfectant or bleach solution to clean surfaces daily
- Pay attention to items that are frequently touched - light switches, door-knobs, phones, toilets, sinks, tubs and showers and kitchen counters
- Wipe the surface or object with the disinfectant and let it dry.

### Disinfectants to use:

- You can use any cleaner you buy at the grocery store that has the word “disinfectant” on it, remember to read the label and follow the directions
- Make your own solution of bleach and water:
- Mix two teaspoons bleach into one quart of water in a spray bottle and label it “bleach solution”



- Make it fresh each time you plan to clean because the bleach evaporates out of the water making it less effective
  - *Never mix bleach with other cleaners, especially ammonia*
- Keep the bleach solution away from children and don't put it in bottles that could be mistaken for something to drink

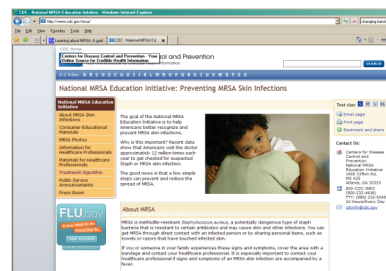
## Things to remember about having MRSA

1. Clean your hands often
2. Take good care of your skin
3. Keep skin infections covered to avoid spreading MRSA to others
4. Questions or concerns about infections should be discussed with your doctor

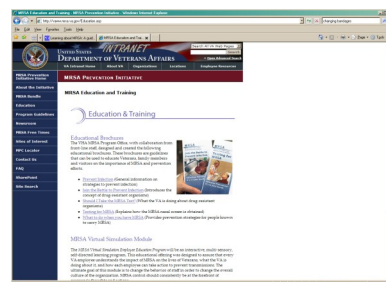
## Looking for more information:

All of the policies and processes used in the VA Black Hills multiple drug resistant organisms programs utilize guidelines from the centers for disease control and the VA mrsa websites

<http://www.cdc.gov/mrsa>



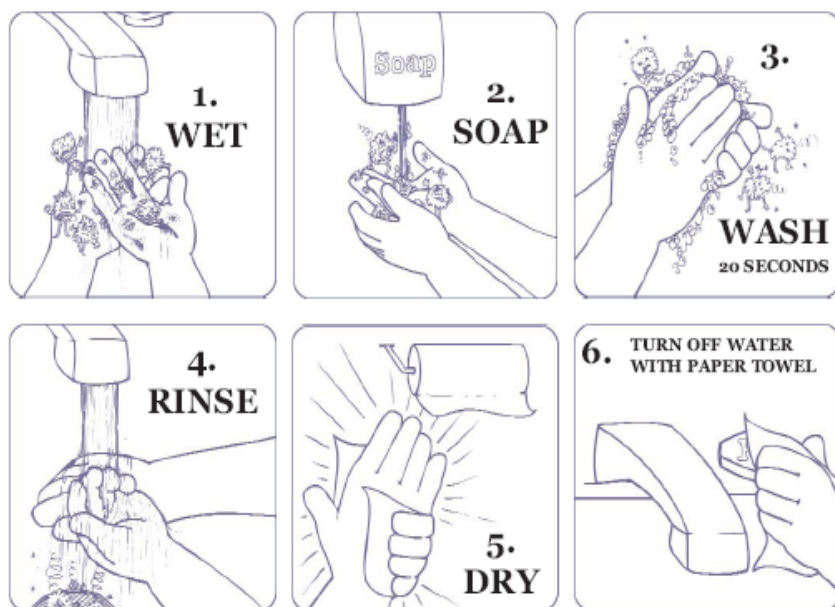
<http://vaww.mrsa.va.gov/>



## Caring for Yourself

### Does it matter how I wash my hands?

Yes. You have to rub your hands for at least 20 seconds to get rid of the bacteria. Follow these instructions:



### How do I clean my hands with alcohol-based hand sanitizer?

Use enough to cover all the surfaces of your hands.



Images adapted with permission from the Washington State Department of Health.

## **MY Questions for the doctor on my care**

To help you remember, this page is available to write down your questions concerning your care.